

U. S. Customhouse and Post Office (now
U. S. Post Office, Georgetown Station)
1221 31st Street, N.W.
Washington (Georgetown)
District of Columbia

HABS No. DC-138

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
Reduced Copies of Measured Drawings

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. DC-138

U. S. CUSTOMHOUSE AND POST OFFICE
(NOW U. S. POST OFFICE, GEORGETOWN STATION)

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Location: 1221 31st Street, N.W., (Georgetown), Washington, D. C., east side of 31st Street (formerly Congress Street) about 120' north of M Street (formerly Bridge Street)

Present Owner: The United States Government

Present Occupant: United States Post Office, Georgetown Station

Present Use: United States Post Office

Statement of Significance: The existence of a customhouse in Georgetown is symbolic of the time when Georgetown was a thriving port of entry. Before Georgetown's incorporation into the District of Columbia (1871), the building also served as the city hall and housed the Georgetown mayor's office. On June 23, 1967, the Customhouse moved out of its second-floor space, leaving the building exclusively to the Post Office. Both interior and exterior details follow the Classical Revival style.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: Begun 1857; completed 1858. The cost of the building was \$55,368.00.
2. Architect: Ammi B. Young, architect; R. R. Scheckeles, master builder.
3. Original and subsequent owners: The building is located in Square 1209, lot 826 (formerly Square 39, lots 5 and 6). The following is an incomplete chain of title to the property. The references are to the Recorder of Deeds, Washington, D. C.

1793 Deed. July 19, 1793, recorded December 13, 1793 in Liber A folio 459
William Deakins Jr. et ux Jane
to
Thomas Cramphin
Parts of lots 5 and 6 beginning at the end of

a line 13'3" drawn easterly parallel with Bridge Street (M Street east of Wisconsin Avenue) from boundary number 14, the said 13'3" being the width of ground conveyed to the Mayor and Corporation of Georgetown for public use to widen East Lane (31st Street above M Street), parallel with Bridge Street 121'-6" to the east line of lot 5, then northerly to said line 280', then westerly 121'-6" to beginning

1856 Deed. October 23, 1856, recorded March 27, 1857 in
Liber JAS 130 folio 243

William F. Seymour et ux Mary C.
to

The United States

Parts of lots 5 and 6; 30' on the east side of Congress Street by 121'-6" deep beginning 371' from the southeast corner of Congress and Gay Streets, being land conveyed to above party by Goodwin G. Williams, Trustee of the estate of Thomas Cramphin

1856 Deed. October 23, 1856, recorded March 27, 1857 in
Liber JAS 130 folio 245

John Dickson et ux Ann
to

The United States

Parts of lots 5 and 6; 30' on the east side of Congress Street by 121'-6" deep, beginning 341' from the southeast corner of Congress and Gay Streets, being land conveyed to above party by Goodwin G. Williams, Trustee of the estate of Thomas Cramphin

1856 Deed. October 23, 1856, recorded March 27, 1857 in
Liber JAS 130 folio 247

James G. Jewell et ux Frances
to

The United States

Parts of lots 5 and 6; 30' on the east side of Congress Street by 121'-6" deep, beginning 311' from the southeast corner of Congress and Gay Streets, being land conveyed to above party by Goodwin G. Williams, Trustee of the estate of Thomas Cramphin

1856 Deed. October 23, 1856, recorded March 27, 1857 in
Liber JAS 130 folio 249
Thomas Cissell et ux Eliza
to

The United States

Parts of lots 5 and 6; 31' on the east side of
Congress Street by 121'-6" deep, beginning 280'
from the southeast corner of Congress and Gay
Streets, being land conveyed to above party by
Goodwin G. Williams, Trustee, of the estate of
Thomas Cramphin. The combined cost of these
four parcels of lots 5 and 6 was \$5,000.

4. Original plans and construction: Photocopies of the published lithographs of some of the original Ammi B. Young drawings are presently in the Design and Construction Drawing Files for Region 3, located in Room 5317, G.S.A. Building, Washington, D. C. There are also blueprints for the alterations and additions to the building.
5. Alterations and additions: The original block of the building has undergone relatively few exterior changes. Formerly, small wooden storm vestibules covered the front entry and south entry in winter. The words "POST OFFICE" are carved into the stone lintel over the main entry. At present, however, a small sign reading "Washington Post Office, Georgetown Station" covers the carving. Access to the Customhouse on the second floor was formerly at the south, where a vertically striped flag flew overhead indicating the entry to the Custom offices on the second floor. To the north is a small addition constructed in 1924. To the rear, a one-story addition was added in 1906 and 1926 to provide additional space for the post office. There have been many interior partition changes and modernizations of the building. An indication of the various alterations, remodelings, and additions to the building is given by the file of blueprints, etc., to be found at the General Services Administration, Region Three, Design and Construction Drawing Files, Washington, D. C. The major items are:

*ND - Elevation and section of building, from Lithographs of original plans by Ammi B. Young (two sheets). Probably from Plans of Public Buildings in Course of Construction Under the Direction of the Secretary of the Treasury, Including the Specifications Thereof. (Washington: Treasury Department, 1855-56.)

*1857 - Copy of lithograph of iron roof trusses.

HABS
DC
GEO
31-

- ND - "Plan of Coping and Steps around Custom House," original drawing in green, red, and black ink labeled "Contractor's copy."
- ND - "Drawing of the lengths of Iron Fence" (and sections).
- 1882 - "Proposed changes to basement runway," (street opening to be altered from 5'-6" wide to about 6'-1" wide among the other changes).
- 1888 - "New Coal Vault and Driveway." (This is located at the east side, toward the north end, and is an underground chamber with shallow concrete vaults on I-beams with round coal-chute covers.)
- ND - "Low Pressure steam heating apparatus."
- 1903 - Repairs to plumbing, second floor.
- 1904 - Changes in first-floor lobby partitions.
- 1906 - Addition to the east side of building, toward the south end (nine sheets).
- 1907 - New door, for the "extension to Custom House."
- 1909 - New loading platform, and various partition changes.
- 1911 - "Proposed changes in M.O. and Reg. Div." (New partitions at north part of post office.)
- 1912 - Two new storm enclosures for south and west entrances.
- 1919 - Repairs to fence. (Large portions of the original fence still remained.)
- 1919 - Building of the front hall counter and windows of post office (to the form now present, in 1969).
- 1923 - "Mailing platform and New Door."
- 1924 - "Remodeling and enlarging," (the present small north wing).
- 1925 - Lighting and plumbing changes.

- *1925 - Plans, showing arrangement of building as of 1925. (Four sheets.)
- 1926 - Lowering grade of rear drive.
- 1926 - "Remodeling and enlarging;" also, a new driveway. (This is the present east addition.) (Ten sheets.)
- *1926 - Plan of east addition, with measurements.
- 1933 - Roof repairs and interior painting.
- 1936 - New iron fence and miscellaneous repairs.
- *1939 - Plans of Customhouse (generally as at present, except for changes in rear or east addition). (Four sheets.)
- 1939 - Plans of building (similar to above).
- 1939 - Grille partitions changed, and other miscellaneous changes in Customhouse hall.
- 1940 - New flag pole for west facade.

Copies of items marked with an asterisk are on file at the Commission of Fine Arts.

In addition to the above, present-day examination reveals a number of other changes in the basement. The east-west wall of the former furnace room has been removed, and the old doorway bricked up. A recent fireproof enclosure for the stairway has been built. On the first floor an exterior window in the stairhall was bricked up when the rear addition was added. On the second floor, when the two lavatories were added at the head of the stairs (apparently late in the 19th century), the ceiling molding was carefully carried around it in the north office and the wall scoring maintained.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

1. History of the Post Office:

Georgetown had its first post office as early as 1776, under the management of Benjamin Franklin, first Postmaster General of the United States. An assistant supervised the Georgetown Branch. At this time there

were only seventy-five other post offices in the United States. Postage rates were based on the number of miles a letter was to be sent: Sixty miles or less, seven cents; sixty to one hundred miles, eleven cents; one hundred to two hundred miles, fifteen cents; two hundred to three hundred miles, nineteen cents; three hundred to four hundred miles, twenty-four cents; four hundred to five hundred miles, twenty-eight cents; over five hundred miles, thirty-three cents. (Richard Jackson, The Chronicles of Georgetown from 1751 to 1878, Washington: 1878, p. 100.)

(A page from Benjamin Franklin's Ledger Book showing the account of the Georgetown Post Office is reproduced facing page 132, Records of the Columbia Historical Society, Vol. 9.)

In this book (p. 97), Jackson writes:

The chronicler remembers when the post office was kept on Congress Street, in a small office, the size of a lawyer's office of the present day, whence it was removed to the basement of a two-story brick house on the same street, when it was transferred to Foxall's Row on Bridge Street, and afterward to the Union Hotel, when it was again pushed back to Foxall's row. It never had a permanent location until Congress purchased a lot of ground on Congress Street....

The following is a list of the early postmasters of Georgetown and the date of their appointment. Among the postmasters are the names of many prominent citizens of the town who often owned a great deal of land and held other governmental positions.

Thomas Richardson	1777
William B. Magruder	February 16, 1790
Richard Forrest	April 1, 1797
Joseph Carleton	February 1, 1799
Tristram Dalton	January 1, 1803
James Armstrong	September 1, 1817
James P. W. Pollock	May 20, 1819
Whiteing Sanford	January 6, 1820
William Huffington	September 18, 1821
Thomas Corcoran	October 22, 1823
James Corcoran	February 1, 1830
Harriet Corcoran	December 18, 1834
"	July 9, 1836

Henry W. Tilley	June 3, 1840
"	June 13, 1842
"	June 17, 1848
"	August 13, 1852
"	August 9, 1856
"	August 3, 1860
Henry Addison	June 6, 1861
George Hill, Jr.	July 12, 1865
Charles H. Cragin	June 17, 1870
George Hill, Jr.	August 6, 1873

In 1877 the Georgetown post office was made a branch of the District of Columbia post office system. (Early Post Office Records, National Archives, Social and Economic Branch.)

Jackson also describes (p. 100) the interior of the post office:

The building is two stories high and fronts sixty-five feet on the street and in altitude is forty-five feet. The first floor is used exclusively as a post office, being fitted up with boxes to the number of nine hundred and fifty-six, with locks and keys; also two spacious rooms for the superintendent and clerks.

2. History of the Customhouse:

Georgetown was established as a port of entry to the United States by an Act of Congress approved March 22, 1779. "It is believed that the port of Washington [i.e. Georgetown] antedates all in existence today; the Williamsburg port may have been created slightly earlier but was abolished many years ago." (Port of Washington Founded 1799," Washington Post, December 22, 1929.)

Throughout the eighteenth century Georgetown was a prosperous port. In 1751 Rock Creek was navigable beyond what is now P Street, forming greater harbor facilities than presently visible.

The mouth of Rock Creek was a broad estuary extending as far west as the foot of Water Street (now Wisconsin Avenue below M Street). Here you went up a steep hill to Gordon's Inspection House on the southwest corner of Bridge and Water Streets....

HABS
DC
GEO
31-

In 1763 there was in Frederick County but one place for the inspection of tobacco, and that 'at the "Rolling House" which George Gordon built near the mouth of Rock Creek.' Exactly when this house was erected does not appear, but it was certainly between the years 1734 and 1748.

(Henry Ridgely Evans, Old Georgetown on the Potomac, Washington, D. C.: 1933, pp. 10-12.)

This Inspection House was the predecessor to the actual government Custom House.

Georgetown enjoyed a large foreign trade just after the Revolution. Its warehouses were packed with casks and bales. Vessels of considerable tonnage were anchored at its wharves, loading and unloading. Thomas Corcoran, a prominent merchant, stated in 1788 that there were in the harbor ten square-rigged vessels, two of them being ships. In 1791 Georgetown ranked as the greatest tobacco market in the State of Maryland, and perhaps in the Union. (Evans, p. 16.)

The site of the actual customhouse established in 1779 has been impossible to locate although the records of the custom collectors are available. (National Archives, Record Group No. 56; Records of the Bureau of Customs.)

General James McCubbin Lingan was the first collector of customs in Georgetown. He was a tobacco merchant who had been wounded in the Revolution at Fort Washington and taken as a prisoner of War. He was among the sixteen Georgetown residents who turned over parts of their land to General Washington to form the Federal City. It is possible that General Lingan collected the customs duties from his home. He collected the following duties:

1789-1791	\$34,387.00
1792	4,830.00
1793	11,122.00

General Lingan was a staunch supporter of the Federalist cause. A weekly Baltimore newspaper, the Federal Republican had been making violent editorial attacks on the administration. Because the paper's Baltimore office was mobbed by protestors, the paper moved to Washington

and set up an office on 30th and M Streets, but then returned to Baltimore. General Lingan, armed, went up to the newspaper office to protect it after a particularly strong editorial published on June 21, 1812, and was clubbed to death by a mob crying "Tory, Tory!" (Evans, pp. 20-21; and "The Port of George Town," The Georgetown, February 6, 1955.)

The following is a list of the early collectors of customs with the dates of their appointments:

James McCubbin Lingan	October 1, 1790 and earlier
John Oakley	October 1, 1801
John Barnes	May 6, 1806
Thomas Turner	March 7, 1826
Robert White	July 20, 1840
Henry Addison	July 9, 1841
Robert White	July 2, 1845
Henry Addison	July 20, 1849
Robert White	April 6, 1853
Henry C. Matthews	April 20, 1857
Judson Mitchell	June 8, 1861
James Magruder	September 15, 1864
Charles S. English	July 27, 1871
Francis Dodge	October 2, 1877

(Jackson, p. 101)

In the early days trade was primarily with the West Indies, rum and tobacco being the principal items of trade.

In 1856 the problem of where to build a permanent customhouse for the District arose and the problem was referred to a Senate committee on commerce. This committee, composed of Senators Hamlin, Dodge, Stuart, Seward, Clay and Benjamin, made an investigation and Chairman Hamlin reported: "There is nothing that can be called commerce in Washington, and there is something of it in Georgetown." Consequently Congress appropriated \$65,000 to build a customhouse and post office in Georgetown. The building was completed in 1858 at a total cost of \$55,468.00.

The second floor of the building was used by the customhouse officials while the basement was used for storage of goods awaiting inspection.

...An importer entering the second floor offices at the turn of the century found

himself confronted by ornate wire and iron grill work on three sides. There was even a chain link net over him. A cashier working at a standup desk would open a door in the grill work and take his money.

Dozens of clerks penned records under elaborate chandeliers. Heat, what there was of it, came from two marble fireplaces.

("Customhouse Quarters Finally Clears the 20th Century," The Evening Star, June 28, 1967.)

In 1864 Senate Bill No. 210 was introduced proposing the abolishment of Georgetown as the port of entry and making the official port in Washington City. The mayor of Georgetown led a violent fight against this bill charging that Congress was attempting to destroy his city. He reported that seven flour mills were producing a capacity of 1,450 barrels of flour per day. Between the years 1825 and 1857 merchants in Georgetown paid duties of \$240,324.81 to the Government.

...the business of this collection district is centered here because of the immense trade of the C&O Canal, which has become, in fact, the Georgetown and Cumberland canal, as its entire trade is now confined to these two places. It has become a vast and increasing trade, from the inexhaustible supplies of coal in the mines at Cumberland, and the unsatiated demand which exists for it in Georgetown.

Nearly one-half of the harbor of Georgetown has been appropriated to the accommodation of that trade where immense depots have been constructed, and the most ingenious and approved methods have been adopted for the safe and ready transfer of the coal from the boats on the canal to the shipping in the river, the transmit being not over one hundred yards.

...There are four regular lines of packets engaged in extensive trade between Georgetown, Philadelphia, New York, and Boston, whose vessels never touch Washington City...

...at a time when the commerce of Georgetown is assuming a magnitude never before approached, the people of Washington City ask your honorable body not to embarrass us by removing from Georgetown a Custom House where it is so much needed, and to place it in Washington City, where there can never be the slightest use for it under any conceivable contingency or imaginable state of circumstances.

(Memorial of Henry Addison, Mayor of Georgetown, D. C. to Congress, Remonstrating against the Proposed Removal of the Custom House from that City to Washington, D. C. with Statistics Sustaining the Same, Washington, D. C.: 1864, pp. 5-7.)

Through these eloquent pleas, coupled with statistics and reports from Georgetown merchants and shippers, Addison was able to convince Congress that the Custom-house should remain in Georgetown.

A letter included in Addison's Memorial from Mr. Hollingsworth, the Collector of Customs, states that many of the coal shippers suffered from the "interruptions caused from rebel invasions" (i.e. the Civil War) and described the port facilities of Georgetown as follows: "Georgetown is the only port from which the coal transported on the canal can be shipped to eastern markets. Its wharfs and depth of water are elegantly adopted to this purpose, and in all probability, shippers will not seek for a more convenient port." (Addison, Memorial, p. 10.)

Toward the end of the nineteenth century Georgetown's importance as a port declined rapidly. This was due for the most part to the competition of the railroads. In 1880 the Immediate Transportation Act was passed allowing goods to come through Washington customs "in bond."

"Little of the stuff comes directly to the waterfront. There are occasional direct shipments of asphalt from Trinidad and Cuba, spruce laths and shingles from New Brunswick and rock plaster from Canada. But the bulk of the business comes into the country through other ports and is 'bonded' to Washington, where examination is made at leisure by officials who have more time and inclination to be polite and obliging than those of New York and Philadelphia."

("Georgetown Custom House," The Sunday Star,
Washington, D. C., April 1, 1906.)

When Georgetown was absorbed into the District of Columbia, the name of the port of entry was officially changed to Washington. In 1913 President Taft ordered a reorganization of customs districts; the port of Washington became a part of Customs District Number 13 which included Maryland, the District of Columbia and Alexandria, Virginia.

Today the majority of imports arriving into this district arrive by air, although there is still a good deal of bonded material sent from other ports.

On June 23, 1967, the Customhouse moved from its 31st Street location to a new building at 3180 Bladensburg Road, N.E., Washington, D. C.

For additional information on the port of Georgetown and the Waterfront area, see Georgetown Historic Waterfront, Commission of Fine Arts and Historic American Buildings Survey, 1968.

3. Ammi B. Young, Architect:

Ammi Burnham Young was born June 19, 1798, in Lebanon, New Hampshire. No record has been found of his formal education, though he did receive honorary degrees from the University of Vermont in 1838 and Dartmouth College in 1841. It is believed that he may have studied under Alexander Parris in Boston. His important commissions include Thornton, Wentworth, and Reed Halls at Dartmouth; the Vermont State Capitol, 1832; the Boston Customhouse, 1836-47; and the Courthouse at Worcester, Massachusetts. In the 1850's he was in Washington working on the south front of Robert Mills' Treasury Building. Young was appointed Supervising Architect of the Treasury Department in 1852 and held that position for ten years. His annual salary was \$3,000. Supposedly Young initiated the policy of hiring only trained architects instead of laymen to hold the position of Supervising Architect. Under his supervision several standardized types of customhouse were developed. They are described by Talbot Hamlin in Greek Revival Architecture in America.

All of them used cast-iron columns and a floor construction of brick arches on wrought iron beams. All of them were classic, with marked 'Italian villa' characteristics in the detail,

HABS
DC
GEO
31-

and in general the extremely refined profiles of Greek Revival moldings had given place to bolder, cruder and perhaps more virile forms.

Hamlin considers the Georgetown building one of the best examples of a simple Italianate palace type. Of this building, and the similar Federal Building at Galena, Illinois, he says:

In these the classical elements are so generalized and the proportions so wide and ample that the effect is almost as Georgian as it is Italian Renaissance, except for the very large scale of the parts.

(Talbot Hamlin, Greek Revival Architecture in America, London: Oxford University Press, 1944, pp. 108-9.)

While in Washington, Young lived at 407 15th Street, N.W. He died in 1874.

(Who Was Who in America, Historical Volume, 1607-1896, p. 602; and Biographical Dictionary of American Architects, Deceased, Los Angeles: 1956, p. 676.)

In 1959 a HABS summer team recorded seven buildings with which the name of Ammi B. Young can be associated. Material from this study led to the publication of the following article which also included bibliographic material: Osmund Overby, "Ammi B. Young in the Connecticut Valley," Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians, October, 1960, pp. 119-123.

C. Sources of Information:

Old views: A photograph of the exterior is in A History of Public Buildings Under the Control of the Treasury Department, Washington, D. C., 1900, p. 78. See also HABS D.C.-Geo. 31-1, an exterior view made in 1937 by John Brostrup.

The Sunday Star (Washington, D. C.) April 1, 1906, has two interior photographs in an article "Georgetown Custom House."

An exterior photograph was found in the Washingtoniana Room of the D. C. Public Library, main branch, which is dated 1918. It shows little visible change.

Prepared by Ellen J. Schwartz
Architectural Historian
Commission of Fine Arts
August 1969

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This rectangular gray granite building is one of the most impressive and monumental public structures in Georgetown. Designed in 1856-57 by Ammi B. Young as a Customhouse, the first floor is now occupied by the Georgetown Station of the Washington, D. C. Post Office. The customs offices have recently been moved from the second floor.
2. Condition of fabric: Very good. There have been various alterations, remodelings, and additions to the building since it was completed in 1858.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: This two-story granite building with a full basement has a 61-foot facade and an original building depth of 46 feet.
2. Foundations: Foundations are smooth granite ashlar ending in a stone water table. On the west (front) elevation this water table is 1'-10" above the terrace.
3. Wall construction: Walls are of finely finished dark gray granite ashlar with courses 1'-4" in height.
4. Structural system, framing: According to original plans for the structure, the roof framing is a grid of metal trusses. Floor construction is of built-up iron channel and plate beams supporting segmental brick vaults. On the first-floor level these beams are supported at intermediate points by cast-iron columns 1 foot in diameter; in the basement, they are supported by 2-foot-square brick piers.

In the basement, the ceiling is composed of twelve shallow brick arches, 8 feet on center, with a rise of 1'-10". These run east-west and are supported on iron (presumably I) beams. The beams in turn are supported by box girders 7" deep and 15" tall. (Where the brick walls are built, the box girders are covered over.) The top

of these girders is 7'-6" from the floor. The girders rest on brick piers, which have simple capitals of three courses of projecting brick.

5. Porches, stoops, bulkheads: On the west and the south, the Customhouse is fronted by a 10-foot-wide stone paved terrace (originally called a "platform"). From the basement, a tunnel approximately 6 feet wide extends under the terrace to the street at the west.
6. Chimneys: From the exterior there appear to be eight chimneys. In fact only six of these originally were operable. The one on the east half of the north wall and that on the east half of the south wall are merely roof appendages for the purposes of symmetry.
7. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: Original plans and elevations show five sets of doors to the first-floor level. Three of these remain in substantially original condition. On the north wall the door has been removed. The doorway at the center of the east elevation has had both door and trim removed, and the opening has been filled.

The original 5'-10" x 11'-0"-high doorways have had their doors replaced by shorter 20th-century wooden doors. Exterior door trim consists of a 1'-4"-wide granite architrave with a cyma backband. Each doorway has a stone cornice and an iron threshold plate, and is reached by three stone steps. The main (west) doorway has a dentiled cornice.

The doorway to the tunnel at the west sidewalk is closed by a pair of 5'-5" metal plate doors approximately 4 feet high.

- b. Windows and shutters: Most of the windows on both the first and second floor are the original six-over-six-light double-hung sash. Window openings have stone lintels and sills and are framed by granite trim. The lower floor windows have flat stone cornices similar to those over the doorways and each has a 5'-7" x 1'-10" under-sill panel. The sills of the first-floor windows are linked together by a projecting stone band. Second-floor windows have crosetted architrave granite trim and a sill supported by a pair of small granite consoles.

Each of the five remaining basement windows has a
2' x 4' grate-covered areaway.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: The simple hipped roof is covered with seamed metal. It is of a low profile and cannot be seen from the street.
- b. Cornice, eaves: The stone cornice is Corinthian-type without modillions and architrave, and is about four feet in height. It is formed with cyma-recta and scotia moldings and has a dentil band.
- c. Cupolas, dormers, towers: None.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

Basement: The basement, like the first floor, is divided into three north-south sections by brick piers 2 feet square, six in each row, with pilasters at the end walls. In the western section a brick wall joins the northern three to the north wall. In the center section a brick wall that ran east-west, connecting the third piers from the north, has been removed. In the eastern section, the stairway, fire wall, and passageways occupy the first four bays; the southern three bays have been closed by a brick wall, and a modern doorway has been installed between the 3rd and 4th piers from the south.

This fourth pier is joined to the east outside foundation wall by a brick wall, which originally had a doorway, now bricked up, into the northern part of this (and the center) section.

First floor: The rectangular space, which measures about 45' x 60' inside, is divided into three north-south sections or aisles by two rows of square iron columns, six free-standing in each row, with half-column pilasters at each end. The columns are 8 feet on center except for the end bays which are 8'-1" (south) and 8'-3" (north). The westernmost aisle is occupied by the public lobby--except for one bay at the north--and is 11'-4" wide. The center aisle is 15'-6" wide, and the easternmost aisle is 14'-0" wide, with the stair hall occupying three bays to the south. These are walled off from the rest of the room. Attached to the east side is a modern addition, doubling the original area.

Second floor: The western two-thirds is one large room, about 27' by 60' (corresponding to the western two sections of the floor below). To the east is a stair hall in the center and an entrance hallway (now separated from it by a fire wall); to the south of the stairs and hallway is an office measuring about 13' x 15-1/2', and to the north a second office measuring about 13' x 20'. Two lavatories have been added off the stair landing, and occupy a corner of this northern room, about 10' x 8'. 31-

Attic: The attic, which is reached by a ladder in the northwest corner of the third-floor hallway, was not examined.

2. Stairways: A cast-iron, straight-run stairway runs south-to-north along the east wall, beginning 7'-6" from the side doorway. It is a run of twenty-six 7-inch risers, with 63-inch-long treads. The pierced risers are decorated with a central palmette and curving swags and sprays. The stringer ends are also open, with similar sprays. The cast-iron newel post is decorated at the base with acanthus leaves, and the balusters (two per tread) are similarly treated. The wooden handrail has a simple oval section. Though now painted light green, other layers have apparently been, consecutively, cream, dark green, beige or gray, and dark green (apparently the original color). The stairway to the cellar is now boxed in by a fire partition, but was originally open at the top to this hallway. The cast-iron balusters (two per tread) have been removed. This is a straight run of 16 risers, from north to south.
3. Flooring: On the first floor, the entrance lobby is paved in 10" x 20" flags of beige marble. The rest of the floor is light brown plastic tile. In the stair hall, the original flooring remains--black marble flags (set at a 45° angle to the walls), measuring 12-1/2" square on a side, and having a white marble border at the wall.

On the second floor, the stair hall is paved in black and white marble identical to the first floor. The offices and the main hall are covered with a brown linoleum, under which there appears to be narrow hardwood flooring, 2-1/2" wide.

The basement has a modern concrete floor.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: All walls are plaster. In the first-floor stair hall, where the plaster is broken at one point, it can be seen that the plaster is directly on the

interior brick walls. The plaster is scored here, and throughout the second floor, to resemble regular coursed ashlar blocks about 66" x 15-1/2". At present all walls are painted light green, but the original color seems to have been a light brown.

The entrance lobby on the first floor, the stair hall, the center section in the post office, and the offices and hall on the second floor have a cove molding at the ceiling. The main hall of the second floor has an Ionic-type molding, about 3' in total height, forming a complete entablature around the ceiling. The ceilings on the first floor are 13'-7" high and on the second floor about 17'. The exterior walls on the first floor are 31-1/2" thick.

In the basement, the walls are of rough-faced random-laid granite blocks, painted white.

5. Doorways and doors: On the first floor, the west entrance doorway is 4'-8" wide and contains modern double doors. At the south end of the lobby there is a second doorway, which also contains modern double doors. At the north end of this westernmost section is a doorway that now leads to the north addition. This is framed in granite, and is 5 feet wide. At each jamb, about 12-1/2" from the floor and the lintel, are two groups of four protruding bolt ends that originally held heavy hinges. Similar remains are to be found in the granite architrave of the (original) rear door at the center of the east wall. This doorway is also 5 feet wide. The doorway from the south terrace to the stair hall has double doors, and an original iron sill. The doorways have no trim.

On the second floor the doorways are 10'-3" tall and 4' wide, with a 7" molding around them. These are six-panel wooden doors, with three hinges and ward locks. There is a doorway at either end of the hallway into the offices, one from the hallway into the hall, and one from each office into the hall.

In the southwest corner of the basement, a large plate-iron two-leaf door, 5'-5" wide and 7'-6" tall, leads into an inclined passage under the west terrace to a second, smaller iron door at the sidewalk level.

6. Decorative features and trim: On the first floor, the major decorative features are the cast-iron Corinthian-

type columns. There are twelve columns, each 11-7/8" square (not including the many coats of paint). Most of the columns have a simple molded base. Although now painted light green, the original color seems to have been dark green. At the north and south walls are four pilasters of the same design. Although the doorways have no trim, the windows have an 8-inch molded architrave, the outer 4-1/2" being of wood, and the rest of iron.

The lobby counters and windows, which are recent and quite plain, were probably originally arched partitions similar to those in the Galena, Illinois, post office and customhouse--a building almost identical to the Georgetown structure in exterior design. (These partitions are illustrated in Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians, XXV, 4 (December, 1966), p. 275, figure 6.)

The decoration of the second floor consists mainly of the doorways, ceiling molding, molding around the windows similar to the first floor, and the scoring of walls to imitate ashlar.

7. Notable hardware: No original hardware seems to remain on the first floor. On the second floor, however, there is a ventilating grate measuring 9-3/4" x 14-3/4" with a pierced floral pattern. It is located in the wall just south of the central door in the main hall, and just above floor level. Also on the second floor are a number of old porcelain doorknobs, ward locks in the doors, and a large 19th-century two-door safe (Sargeant & Greenleaf, latest patent date 1871). In the basement there are several sets of wrought-iron shutters for the outside windows. These consist of two folding panels on each side (each panel measuring 12" x 5'-2"), which fold back against the thickness of the wall.

When closed, the four panels are secured by a swing bar which rotates on the inside. Three sets of these window shutters remain, and possibly a fourth behind a fuse-box installation. By the door to the stair hall there is one remaining speaking-tube fixture.

8. Lighting: The only indication of original lighting arrangement is on the second floor. In the main hall, there are three rows of gas butts running north-south. In the center of the room there is a row of three; and at the east and west portions, rows of four. Each of the second-floor offices has a central gas butt remaining

in the ceiling. On the upper stair landing, one gas butt remains in the east wall.

9. Heating: Although eight chimneys are visible on the exterior, the two easternmost of the north and south sides are sham. On the first floor, the two chimneys on the west side do not extend down to the lobby. The two on the north and south sides extend to the first floor, but have no openings, and no trace of stovepipe openings. On the east wall, the southern chimney does not extend to the first floor, and the northern one is completely blocked up. Those on the north and south walls are also completely blocked.

On the second floor, the main hall has four chimneys: two against the end walls, north and south, and two against the west wall. Only one, however, has traces of a stovepipe opening. In the two offices the original mantels are still in place. In the south office is a cream colored, marble chimney piece, with simple undecorated side pilasters supporting a lintel whose lower edge is cut in the form of a shallow pointed arch. The mantel measures 44-1/2" square, with a mantel shelf 50" x 9-1/2". A late-19th-century mirror, in a dark wood enframingent, is placed above it, although it is not original. The fire opening measures 16" x 26-1/2" and has a cast-iron molded enframingent with a small decorative fleur-de-lis at the top. The fireplace in the north office has a chimney piece with two carved Corinthian pilasters. Probably of light colored marble, this chimney piece is now painted flat black. It measures 50" x 44-1/2", and the shelf (whose right end is partially imbedded in the new wall of the two small lavatories added from the corner of this room) measures 51" x 8-3/4".

The fire opening is 31-1/2" x 20-1/2".

Originally the building was heated by steam, with a furnace in the northeast corner of the basement.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The Georgetown Customhouse faces west onto 31st Street and is set on a stone terrace about 4 feet above sidewalk level on the south (downhill) side, and 1 foot on the north. This terrace extends across the front, where it is 15'-1" wide, and along the south side, where it is 12' wide. Directly north of the building (and terrace) is a truck drive

22'-11" wide; to the south of the south terrace is a drive 9'-6" wide.

2. Enclosures: On the north side of the north truck drive, a brick wall marks the property line. South of the south drive there is a similar brick wall, and to the east a concrete wall. The terrace of the building now has a modern iron fence at the west, north, and south edges. In the stone, however, there are traces of iron fence posts about 2 feet square, which flanked the two stairways from the sidewalk, and the entrance to the north driveway. These posts, and the rest of the iron fence, are visible in old photographs. The southwest corner of the south terrace also has traces of a similar iron fence post.
3. Outbuildings: None.
4. Walks: The west terrace abuts a public concrete sidewalk. The terrace itself is now concrete, except for the original granite coping and steps.
5. Landscaping: None.

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PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records were made in 1969 during a project to record 14 structures and a group of 16 items of "street furniture" in the Georgetown section of Washington, D. C. The project was conducted by the Commission of Fine Arts with the cooperation of the Historic American Buildings Survey. The resulting documentation was donated to HABS by the Commission and published in 1970 in HABS Selections Number 10, Georgetown Architecture: Northwest Washington, District of Columbia.

The project was under the direction of Mr. Charles H. Atherton, Executive Secretary and Administrative Officer of the Commission of Fine Arts. The recording team was composed of Miss Ellen J. Schwartz and Mr. Daniel D. Reiff, Architectural Historians, and Mr. William P. Thompson, Architect. The photographs were made by photographers J. Alexander and Jack E. Boucher under contract to the Commission. Mr. M. Hamilton Morton, Jr., AIA, was commissioned by HABS in 1970 to make the drawings of the U. S. Customhouse and Post Office.